

JUL  
26

UNIQUE TALES OF TERROR AND WONDER

NO. 35

# BLACK SHEEP

*This Issue...*



**THE TOKYO TANGO**  
**WAYNE KYLE SPITZER**

**GREEN PEDAL  
TRACTORS**  
**MARY JO RABE**

*And much more, including...*

**HOBBS  
END  
PRESS**

ISS35 JUL 2026

---

## ROAD TRIP TO SOUTH CAROLINA

*Rob Rogers*

The Benchwarmer climbed past the plastic coolers and a folded beer pong table into the front passenger seat of the rented RV and handed the driver a cold Coke, after being woken from his hazy slumber in the back bedroom by Wolfman for a shift change. The others were all passed out in the middle lounge, as they had been since their coach breached the city limits of Columbia. The punch of their sun-drenched gameday sweat and snoring beer breath lingered in the main cabin like a wet dog. The Benchwarmer pointed his AC vent to blow the smell away from the cockpit.

"I can take over for a few hours if you want, Batesy. Where the hell are we?"

"About an hour south of Savannah, I think. I'm alright, I can probably make it the rest of the way to Orlando, if you pass over that beef jerky."

"Suit yourself, bro. I'll get my dip on and keep you awake."

The Benchwarmer lifted his sore feet to the front passenger dash and sank back into the still warm cushion as the tracers of oncoming northbound semis in the opposite lane blinded his awakening eyes. He knew Batesy was fine to drive, and he settled in for the long haul ahead through the moonless night.

"I still can't believe we missed those field goals. Urban played down the miscues in his postgame presser, but that game was more stressful than it needed to be."

"Yeah, thank god for Trattou and Joe Haden. We should've blown them out."

Two national championships and a Heisman Trophy in three years have a way of spoiling a fan base and sapping the joy out of a 20-game winning streak.

"The South Carolina fans near us were dicks. They let us have it in the men's room at halftime."

"Mediocrity breeds excitement in the War Chickens. I was in the Gators section. We had one drunk fan who got himself kicked out, but the natives around us were pretty tame family types."

Batesy chuckled and stretched. He had been up as long as the rest, but the years of running had apparently given him impressive powers of recuperation. It also probably helped that he and Wollman were still in their 20s.

"You sure you're alright? This thing must be a bitch to drive."

"It's pretty cool actually, like driving a school bus. I'm good, man. Kinda like it actually. We can take a piss break right before I-4, and maybe then you can take over."

The highway back to Central Florida stretched on endlessly, the streetlights marking the road ahead like channel markers.

There was always a calmness about Batesy. His chilled-out ease made for a nice break from the party over the last 60 hours.

"Wonder how the hell Sharks is gonna get back to Jacksonville."

"Sergeant said he'll see a judge on Monday morning. The married couple is sticking around for one more day to bail him out and drive him back. I guess they smoothed things out with the condo place."

"I didn't even realize they were friends."

"I doubt they'll be for much longer after Friday night."

The Benchwarmer laughed and returned his thoughts to football. The hiccups on offense were getting old, but with the cupcake the following week and then FSU in tatters for the Thanksgiving game, he was pretty sure they were still in good shape to get back for one more crack at the National Championship to further cement Tebow's legacy. As long as they could get past Alabama in Atlanta.

"Well, if you don't need me to drive, I may as well have another beer. We can let Sarge take over in Daytona if you get tired." The Benchwarmer reached behind the seat and took one of the last three Miller Lites from the near cooler.

"Yeah man, just kick it. We should get home by 4. Relax and enjoy the ride"

The 2009 road trip to South Carolina had been Sarge's idea, but it didn't take much coaxing to get the Benchwarmer on board. By then he had already been to all but two SEC schools for Gator road games, and he had only missed three home games in the prior seven seasons. He was a Spurrier era Gator, forged into fanaticism during the golden years of Florida football, and college football was his only religion. But this was the first time he'd had the chance to road-trip in an RV, and it was his first time going with the kickball crew instead of his friends from college.

Co-ed adult kickball had been the guiding force of the Benchwarmer's limited social calendar when he wasn't practicing law or screaming his lungs out in Gainesville. Initially skeptical that it was a kid's game, he had joined his wife's team a few years earlier after the league's inaugural season, and he instantly became a convert. This was not the kind of kickball you played during recess at elementary school.

The local league of the American Kickball Association was a young professionals' shit-show, a Thursday night drunk fest where off-duty lawyers, nurses, and investment analysts pounded Jello shots and carried roadies onto the field during hour-long games between 6:30 and 9:30, then bee-lined straight to the sponsor bar for downtown debauchery until the bouncers kicked everyone out at 2 a.m. Orlando's major employers had learned to stop expecting any staff under the age of 30 to show up before 10 a.m. on no-classes Fridays. It was how the local core of young professionals not yet ready to leave college behind hung on to their glory days for just a few years longer. Many children were conceived and marriages broken on those star-kissed Thursday nights.

Sergeant was the captain of the team and a lawyer at another firm in the Benchwarmer's high rise downtown. A natural and self-appointed leader, he had built the squad into a winner in its first season and piloted them the next year to a championship and their only trip to the nationals in Vegas. He was also one hell of a pitcher who had been the first in the league to master the three-hop sinker, and his 2-to-8 curveball bounced low and away from right-footed kickers and was impossible to tag with any juice. He didn't have the strongest liver on the team, but he was close.

Batesy and Wolfman had joined the team with two other college friends the season they won the league, and all four fit in perfectly. They were all engineers from UF and were as zealous about football as the other Gators on the team. They were also still in their twenties and athletic, so they instantly filled the top of the line up and the key positions on the infield. Despite their

good looks, they were easy going and humble outdoor lovers who instantly gelled with the older guys and their wives. Bonds were formed quickly.

The Benchwarmer basked in the glow of the younger guys. With no athletic ability of his own but an avid interest in tactical play, he came off the bench to play short rightfield and usually had to bunt to get on base, but he always volunteered to coach third. He knew he sucked, but he didn't care. He just loved being able to get shit-faced while playing on a winning team that had younger guys who brought attractive women to the team table at the post-game party. The Benchwarmer's wife never minded. She was partying right there with them in her more refined designated-driver kind of way, and she knew her husband was not interested in playing the field. He only wanted to relive his college days vicariously through the engineers.

Sarge had wanted to road-trip in an RV for years, and since the Gators on the kickball team all had gainful employment, he could now finally assemble willing travelers who could afford to split the high price off a three-day RV rental eight ways. Batesy, Wolfman, and the Benchwarmer committed right away. Sarge then talked four other college friends into going by handling logistics. A skilled party planner, he put together an itinerary that satisfied everyone.

The plan was to pick up the RV on Thursday and leave Orlando after work that evening, so they could split the seven-hour drive to Columbia into two days. They'd spend Thursday night at a campground north of Jacksonville after picking up Sharks, a friend of Sarge's with a hard-partying pedigree and the only one going with no ties to UF. They'd all then shoot up to Columbia on Friday morning and park the RV at an old minor league baseball park a half mile from Williams-Brice Stadium. Another pair of Sarge's friends from Jacksonville, a married couple, would then arrive on Friday night and meet the crew at a two-bedroom suite they rented for everyone at a condominium several miles away. The condo was just uphill from Five Points, the hub of Columbia's college bar scene, where they would party

the night before the game. They'd then take taxis back to the RV on Saturday morning, tailgate until kickoff at 3:30, spend Saturday night back at the condo, and then drive home Sunday morning.

The eight from Orlando all arrived on time at Sarge's house on Thursday evening and hit the road promptly at 6:30, leaving the setting sun behind them as they headed east on I-4. They got down to business immediately. One of Sarge's college friends had volunteered to drive the whole way to Jacksonville, so the others were free to get acquainted and begin shot-gunning beers.

There were only three rules on the RV. No smoking inside, not even weed. No puking. And absolutely no deuces in the bathroom. Regardless of the manufacturer's instructions, the vehicle's plumbing was to be used only for fluid evacuation. Anyone who has ever been trapped on a Greyhound with a passenger with irritable bowel syndrome knows why. The destructive force of the chemical toilet in a recreational vehicle when used for solid excrement is not to be underestimated.

In retrospect, it now seems baffling that this band of post-graduate teenagers did not sense the danger lurking ahead when the stink bomb in the bathroom exploded.

When Sarge and the Benchwarmer had picked up the RV, they had been assured by the proprietor that the black water tank had been emptied. As proof, the shifty bugger had demonstrated how to check the tank's capacity by pressing a button in the kitchen, which had a nearby gauge with four bars corresponding to the tank's holding capacity. During the demonstration, none of the bars lit up, indicating that the tank was less than one-quarter full. The team therefore had no reason to believe that the unholy vat of fermenting feces lying just below their feet would need to be emptied before the vehicle was returned on Sunday.

They learned the sick truth when the first of the group urinated just east of Deland. As soon as the toilet handle was

depressed, a gurgling belch of a thousand dirty diapers was unleashed and instantly filled the bathroom cubicle. The user immediately jumped back into the kitchen and slammed shut the sliding door, hoping to contain the mushroom cloud. But within seconds, the asphyxiating blast of a sewage treatment plant in a bad neighborhood permeated each passenger's skin and overpowered their olfactory glands.

Hearing the burning cries of the victims behind him, the driver lowered the front windows to attempt to circulate breathable oxygen. But even after the back passengers pulled open the shoebox-sized sliding windows on the sides of the fuselage, the air could not be purified. Rather, the jet blast from the larger front windows forced the horrible odor to swirl in the back cabin like a muddy hurricane.

Somehow a dive mask and snorkel left by prior renters were found in a kitchen cabinet, and they were promptly strapped to the face of the driver to allow him to sustain flight while he leaned against the cab to allow the snorkel to project outside the moving vehicle. Several passengers fled to the rear bedroom and doused makeshift breathing cloths with cologne before diving beneath blankets. The others tore cigarettes in half and placed them in their nostrils, then pressed their faces to window screens to gasp for fresh air between gulps of beer. A shot of Jack Daniels was deliberately spilled on the mat outside the bathroom to neutralize the smell, but that only made it worse.

Accusations were immediately leveled at Sergeant and the Benchwarmer. They pled their innocence by pressing the tank button and confirmed that it was nearly empty. The travelers remained baffled at what had gone wrong for more than a half-hour. But then it occurred to Wolfman to try holding the button down for several seconds. After three seconds, the lights on the gauge rose like the mercury in a fat man's sauna. Those rats at the rental company had not emptied the shit tank after all. A bad yelp review and a strongly worded email were clearly warranted.

Consideration was given to pulling over and emptying the chemical toilet into a roadside gutter. But Sarge speculated that doing so might be a felony, and the others agreed that their paper towels and hand sanitizer could not adequately cleanse any hands or clothing soiled by overspray from the PVC tube if connection mistakes were made in the dark. The poor sap would have to be left behind on the side of the interstate, and no one wanted to cover another share of the RV rental fee.

And so they just gritted their teeth and drove the remaining two hours to the campground. A round of shots were administered as anesthesia to all but the driver. Sharks was warned by text message to meet the junket at the campground. Sarge nobly fell on his sword and volunteered to empty the tank d'poo upon arriving at the campground if he couldn't bribe any staff there to do it for him.

Order was restored after the caravan reached the campground. Sarge took his penance like a man and dutifully drained the black water tank into the campground's nuclear waste disposal system while wearing the driver's mask and snorkel. Some in the group watched from a safe distance like witnesses to a medieval beheading—close enough to see and hear the agony, but far enough to be spared from smelling it.

But then the weekend warriors got down to business. The coach was parked at a requested site at the rear of the property and slide-out compartments were extended. Cornhole sets and beer pong tables were erected, and the drinking began in earnest. This was to be a dress rehearsal for Saturday's tailgating festivities, and equipment was checked and recalibrated. The weather was cool and the campground was mostly empty, with neighbors far enough away to not be bothered. To appease the gods, music was still kept at minimum volume to respect the hosts. Soon the wounds to nasal linings were medicated with drink and smoke. It was a fine way to salvage the evening.

By midnight a campfire was lit and the gathering melted into a quieter faze. Eventually the hardier travelers looked for ideal spots to pitch their sleeping bags outside, and Batesy

climbed atop the roof of the RV to commune with the stars. The older statesman claimed spots on the couches inside the now fumigated main cabin. The Benchwarmer was barricaded into the back bedroom with an inflated air mattress pressed against the door, the vacant spaces between the door frame sealed with rolled towels. What could they say, the bastard snored like a drowning walrus.

The sun peaked between the crowns of the longleaf pines early Friday morning, and slowly the man children awoke. The sunshine caught Batesy first, and he climbed off the roof and thoughtfully began packing up the tailgating furniture to prepare for the final sprint to Columbia. As the others rose, most began mixing instant coffee and munching on leftover Doritos, while Sharks toasted the morning by chugging a PBR. Several utilized camp showers while others cleansed with morning dips in the campground pool. They were remarkably hygienic.

Most of the crew nursed their hangovers in pleasant relaxation during the drive to Columbia and saved their livers for the night ahead. Blackberries were checked and secretaries consulted to assure that any fires at work were suppressed until the following week. Sarge volunteered to take the helm for the jog up I-95, and they timed their mid-morning departure to avoid rush hour traffic in Jacksonville and Savannah and beat the flood of fans into Columbia.

They arrived at the parking lot at the baseball stadium around 2:00 and were immediately pleased with their tailgating spot. Parking spots for busses and RVs can be tricky to find for visiting fans to most SEC stadiums and are often far from the heart of the good tailgating. But back in 2009, the RV lot beside the old park for Columbia's defunct minor league baseball team was a choice location for big haul road-trippers determined to go to a South Carolina game. It was just a half mile from Williams-Brice Stadium, and the knowledgeable RV crowd apparently knew it well.

By late Friday afternoon, the baseball stadium lot had filled with well-financed RV commodores from both teams. These veterans loved SEC football and knew what they were doing. Without hookups for electricity, the main fleet came prepared with quiet generators and ample supplies of fuel to keep the party going all weekend. Telescoping awnings were extended over exterior storage compartments converted to full bars and entertainment centers for big screen televisions linked to satellite antennas. Tables were set with catered barbecue in aluminum trays heated with paraffin candles and tended by aging trophy wives sipping whisky sours. This crowd would not be going to Five Points. They brought their own brand of commitment to youthful nostalgia. Theirs was a more genteel affair. Their agenda was to mingle with other third-generation football families in their outdoor living rooms, before retiring early to slumber in quiet comfort before the madness arrived the next morning.

The kickball crew could tell they stood out as amateurs. Their single 32-inch flat screen would be set on their only folding table and would search for UHF signals from local television affiliates using a \$10 set of bunny ears from Radio Shack. Food had been an afterthought and would be served cold. But the Old Timers passed no judgment and welcomed them like family. They offered tours of their chariots and shared food and drink. A few even joined rounds of shots and offered swigs from unmarked bottles of homemade whiskey. This was Southern hospitality at its finest. They were the standard bearers of SEC tailgating culture, the god parents that glued the generations together. The neophytes from Florida knew they had come to the right place.

The clincher that had sold the guys on traveling more than 400 miles in a rented RV to Columbia with a half-dozen other grown men was an agreement to find some form of bricks and mortar secondary housing with indoor plumbing for the two nights in

Columbia. Although they were prepared for some inconveniences, the man children knew they couldn't endure three nights of drinking without a full-sized shower and flushing toilet, and no one wanted to try falling asleep piled in an oversized van for three nights. The spring-break mystique of cramming a dozen guys into a sweaty 2-star hotel room was not part of the college experience any of them wanted to relive.

With Vrbo and Airbnb still more than a decade from conception, the initial presumption was that they'd need to park the RV for the two nights in Columbia at a motel, get a single room, and let beer pong decide who would win the privilege of sleeping indoors. The condo suite pulled by the married couple added a touch of class, providing not only ample climate-controlled space for the entire crew to crash, but a full-sized kitchen and living room for pre-drinking on Friday night and even a second shower and bathroom. Hell, the place even had a second-floor balcony facing a main route to the bars, which was crawling after sunset with packs of boisterous college girls shivering in halter tops and miniskirts. They had to hand it to Sarge, he had really come through.

No one seemed to enjoy it all more than Sharks. He had hunted out the Smoky Mountain moonshine at the RV lot, and when everyone arrived at the condo with their day packs and inflatable air mattresses, he immediately took inventory of the booze and inspected the bong and the pot drawer like a customs agent. Too many seeds for his taste, but there seemed to be enough weed for at least 12 hours.

"Don't put any of your shit in the second bedroom, muthafuckers, you're all sleepin' out here tonigh'. That room is mine for the threesome I'mma bring back after closing time."

None of Sarge's friends knew much about Sharks. He seemed to be a friend of a friend who'd always just hung around and brought color to the party. His moniker had been earned years ago while surfing, apparently after an animated encounter with misidentified dolphins while tripping on acid. But no one doubted by Friday night that he had come to throw down. If the

RV trip to South Carolina was spring break for the other guys, it was going to be a full-blown grad night for Sharks.

While the other man children traded turns showering, Sharks focused on getting fucked up as quickly as possible. Sarge's married friends were happy to join him after their long drive from Jacksonville, as they had some catching up to do and the clock was ticking. Nothing sucks worse than losing a light buzz while waiting in line outside in the cold at a packed dive bar for college kids to convince bouncers of the authenticity of their fake IDs. There was no time to lose getting to the fifth dimension.

By 9:30, the party was in full swing. Pyramids of beer cans were piling up while guys who were strangers hours ago were assigning each other friendly new nicknames and taunting each other for backing out of follow-up shots. It's always refreshing to make new connections, and cannabis and Fireball seemed to fortify bonds quickly.

Eventually it was time to hit the Five Points to represent the alma mater in enemy territory and meet the locals on their home turf. Specially selected orange and blue collared shirts and jackets were put on, many endowed with good luck on prior trips to championships and upset victories. It is, after all, important for other friendlies to identify their kin from a distance. Everyone in the SEC knows that the true test for a fan base is bringing numbers on the road, and the undergraduate bars were where the weekend warriors counted coup. It was time to storm the ramparts and raise the colors where the defenders were preparing for battle.

There's an etiquette to it all, of course. Trash talking is a prerequisite, to be delivered and rebuked, and even freshmen know to take it in stride. But discretion must be exercised, as you are still their guests. Although supportive cheers for one's own school are to be shouted at maximum volume, pejorative attacks are to be kept impersonal and limited to taunts about either football or the academic reputation of the opponent's school. Personal attacks about an adversary's masculinity or

lineage are to be avoided. The young and old are also to be spared (they rarely engage anyway), and most provocation is to be directed at male students and young alumni. Mothers, wives, girlfriends, and daughters are strictly off limits. No one wants to embarrass their school. Or drive away the girls.

Naturally, intoxicants impair restraint, especially in foreign territory, where the stress of being outnumbered can embitter collegiate pride. But this was a seasoned crew of happy drunks, and they had no intention of offending their hosts. Years of road-tripping and countless nights proselytizing shoving matches in crowded nightclubs and bleachers had armed the man children with the tools for dousing cinders when the banter got heavy. Each was prepared to intervene between warring parties and offer apologies and to pivot discourse to anecdotes about Steve Spurrier, the common coaching denominator that united the schools. There are few disputes that could not be resolved with an offer to buy a conciliatory beer. After all, no one wanted to get arrested.

And so the weekend warriors strode in the brisk cold to the Five Points, stumbling over sidewalks and placing the wife of Sarge's friend at the front as an ambassador to pacify any disaffected residents. Occasionally they were peppered by unseen taunts from the keg parties they passed, and they sent back volleys of PG-13 rated repudiations. But slowly the illumination and pulse of the Five Points beckoned. They eventually ran head on into a sea of traffic and humanity. They were now in the belly of the beast. It was time to find a grubby bar to open a tab and fuel the fires for the next day's war.

Batesy, Wolfman, and the Benchwarmer got back to the condo with most of the other guys just before 2 a.m., where the married couple had already retired to the master bedroom. None of them were on the prowl for romantic company, so there was no point in waiting until closing time to settle their tabs. Besides, the real party was still to come at the tailgate, and it would be wise to

get a good night's sleep. They also knew there was enough weed left in the pot drawer for a nice nightcap. Within minutes, the crew had retired to the balcony to pass around the bong as drunk girls stumbled back to their dorms beneath the streetlights, some dragging friends away from potential indiscretions with substandard suitors that they'd have regretted the next morning.

It had been almost two hours since anyone had seen Sarge or Sharks. Sharks wasn't satisfied with the vibes in the bar the others had selected, and Sarge prudently followed him out to find more action. Sharks had been the center of attention before he left. He was quick to engage with frat guys, and a round of shots had been deemed necessary to pacify a well-dressed Gamecock alum whose girlfriend had been offended by one of his compliments. But none of it was too worrisome. He'd been going hard all day, and a few missteps were to be expected.

As the night drew to a close, air mattresses were inflated and a round of paper-rock-scissors awarded one of the twin beds to Sarge's accountant friend. The other bed had been reserved for Sarge as compensation for his planning efforts. Pre-teen sleepover banter waned after the kitchen lights were flicked off shortly after 2:30. Ever the light sleeper, the Benchwarmer rested quietly, attempting to stay conscious long enough to avoid disturbing the others with his volcanic apnea.

He was jolted awake at 3:09 a.m. by the careless crack of the front door. The kitchen light was switched on, and the refrigerator door was pulled open with a bang. A bottle of beer was uncapped with a hard smack against the edge of the kitchen counter. Sharks and Sarge had made it back, and the night had not ended well.

"I can't belie' those suhs-ah-bishes ran up a thousan' dorrers on my fuggin' credeh card. Murr-fuggers!" Sharks had apparently overspent.

"Dude, you sat on top of the bar and yelled 'Next round's on me.' What the hell did you think was gonna happen?"

Sharks had waited to retrieve his credit card until the bouncers pushed the last of the patrons out shortly after 2:00, and he was unpleasantly surprised when he learned that they had run his tab up to \$1,137.83—an impressive sum given that beers and wells were only \$3.50 each. The automatic 16 percent gratuity added insult to injury. Heated negotiations ensued for the next half-hour and were eventually concluded with threats to call the police. Sarge's intervention had been appreciated by the bartender, and he left her an extra \$100 for her troubles.

Sarge was now tired of babysitting. He declined Sharks' invitation to have another beer and left to get some sleep, locking the bedroom door behind him.

Stirred from his slumber beside the screen door to the balcony, the Benchwarmer kept his eyes closed and tried in vain to get back to sleep as Sharks stumbled around the kitchen.

Moments later a subsonic wave of fury pulsed through the room. The pot drawer was pulled open aggressively, then slammed shut with rage. No night cap had been saved for Sharks.

"Those dirry fuggin bishes! They finish'd all the weed!"

That was the last straw for Sharks. Within seconds, the claws came out. He transformed instantly into a trailer park Hulk.

From his hidden position feigning sleep, the Benchwarmer heard the beer bottle shatter and a barely coherent rant of homophobic epithets erupt from the kitchen. He couldn't believe the others were still asleep. He quietly pulled a potted plastic fern in front of his air mattress, hoping to remain concealed.

Sharks decided it was time for revenge. The married couple had unwisely left their bedroom door unlocked, and Sharks pushed it open without turning on the lights. The unmistakable crackle of liquid falling on carpet and upholstery rapped through the shadows.

"These fuggers er gonna smoke all the weed? Then ther gonna geh' pissed on."

The Benchwarmer quickly weighed his options for escape. Confrontation with the beast would be unwise, the wacked out bastard was capable of anything. The front door was at least 12 strides away, and a retreat through the heavy screen door to the balcony would surely draw attention. Plus, there were the others. He did not want Batesy and Wolfman to get peed on.

Within seconds Sharks had returned, his blood boiling. Batesy was closest, asleep on the couch without even a bed sheet to shield him. Sharks took firing position beside his right shoulder.

An alarm had to be sounded. The Benchwarmer took a deep breath and ripped out a loud cough, hoping to distract Sharks for a split second and save Batesy from inundation.

It worked. Batesy opened his eyes and immediately understood his peril.

"Sharks, what in the fuck are you doing with your dick out?" It was less a question than a threat.

Batesy leapt to his feet and pushed the crazy fool against the far wall. Momentarily stunned, Sharks struggled to regain his balance, clutching for a handhold to regain his footing, his flaccid phallus waving from side to side.

The room then erupted in chaos, as the shell-shocked others scrambled to pull on t-shirts and grab their pillows. Wolfman ran to the second bedroom and pawed in vain at the locked door.

"Active Pisser! Active Pisser! Let Us In Now!"

The percussion of Wolfman's fist on the door alerted Sarge from the shower. A moment later the door unlocked and Wolf bulldozed past Sarge, knocking the towel off his waste. The others dove in seconds later, escaping just in time before slamming the door shut behind the last survivor.

Having regained his wits, Sharks punched and kicked the door as Wolfman leaned against it to hold it shut. The others instinctively left the lights off.

"Gedd out heer you fuggin' assshoes! Yer gonna pay!"

Sharks had run out of ammunition, so he took his anger out on the kitchenware. A muffled tornado of shattering glass and ceramic and kicked air mattresses and duffle bags echoed under the bedroom door off the kitchen tile.

Soon the shout of a different voice could be heard. The husband was now awake, and his instinct to protect his spouse and his bill for incidentals had been triggered. The distinct sound of palms on chest could be heard over more shouting. Sharks had been invited to leave.

A moment later the door to the central hallway slammed shut, and the sound of cracking light fixtures could be heard through the concrete block walls.

The survivors in Sarge's bedroom looked at each other and pondered their options. Several raced into the living room to retrieve their linens and luggage before returning quickly, intent to take refuge for the night in the second bedroom. But there was only so much room. No one could be certain how long it would be until the Active Pisser returned. Sarge grabbed a pair of boxers and went out to console the married couple and prepare a line of defense.

The Benchwarmer remembered the business card for the taxi service he had grabbed from the condo's guestbook and flipped open his phone. He was done with the pandemonium.

"Good luck, guys. I'm outta here."

"I'm right there with you." Wolfman grabbed the keys to the RV off the nightstand by Sarge's bed. They stuffed essentials into their backpacks and left the air mattresses behind. They were on the corner waiting for the cab in three minutes flat.

The Benchwarmer woke up shivering in the bedroom at the back of the RV around 9:30, buried beneath the covers and pillows. Wolfman chose to forgo soundproofing the main cabin and was still passed out on the couch. When the taxi had delivered them to the baseball stadium five and a half hours earlier, the mercury had dipped into the high 40s, and the inside

of the RV felt like a meat locker. The rental company had mentioned a way to activate the generator to power nighttime heating, but neither of the refugees could figure out how to turn it on.

By the time the Benchwarmer got back from the restroom trailer on the other side of the parking lot, Wolfman was awake and checking his Blackberry from the couch. Bench grabbed two beers from the fridge and handed one to Wolfman.

"Sleep well, Sunshine? I'm still thawing out."

"I still can't feel my toes. Dude, that was crazy last night. If Sharks would have pissed on me, I'd have Kicked. His. Ass."

"Can't wait to see what he's like today. I have a feeling he may be a little late getting here."

The crew had planned ahead and restocked on beer and booze outside Orangeburg before parking the RV, and the first two cases were already in the fridge. So Wolfman and Bench brushed their teeth and pulled out the folding chairs, beer pong tables, and tv. They were ready to resume the party by the time the rest of the crew got back from the condo. Batesy arrived around 10:30 in the first taxi with the Benchwarmer's air mattress and three bags of ice for the coolers.

"Sarge is gonna be a little late. He's sleeping in after the long night."

"Where'd you all make Sharks sleep?"

"He never came back last night. Sarge chain locked the door and hung out in the living room for a half-hour after cleaning up the broken glass to set Sharks straight. But no one has heard from him, and his phone is still on the kitchen counter."

"Tender mercies."

"I heard a rumor in the lobby that someone got pinched last night at the pool. A security guard found a naked guy asleep in the hot tub at 5 in the morning. We left a note for Sarge to check with the condo manager when he wakes up to see if it's him."

All the guys laughed. The sun was shining, and the RV lot was starting to fill up with hungover college kids. Five hours of sleep was not much for their age, but it was enough. The first case of Bud Light was finished by 11:15.

Sarge finally arrived just past noon. They made sure to have a stiff Jack and Coke waiting for him. The guys were all looking forward to what he had to report.

"Sharks is at County. He was still asleep when I called the jail. He apparently didn't tell the security guard anything about where he was staying, but it looks like they're going to charge him with vandalism and drunk and disorderly. My buddy's gonna check on him after the game once his wife cools down. They have some friends at a Cockaboose and won't make it here today."

"Guess Sharks won't make it to the game." Batesy didn't seem disappointed.

"He didn't have a ticket anyway. He was just gonna scalp one at the gate. But I think he blew his bankroll last night anyway. He'll be fine."

Wolfman and the Benchwarmer patted Sarge on the shoulder.

The accountant then brought out a tray of Fireball shots, with a specially made double for Sarge. The man children raised their glasses.

"Sarge, you are now officially off duty. To Sharks!"

The sweet poison burned as it went down. But not enough to stop anyone from getting hammered again. The crew got reacquainted with their neighbors and mixed with the locals. A highlight was when Batesy shared a shot ski with three generations of ladies from the family in the American Coach from Charleston down the lane. The guys were thoroughly sauced by the time they left for the stadium around 2:15.

Batesy was still alert and relaxed as the RV passed St. Augustine shortly around 3 in the morning, and the Benchwarmer was

enjoying their cruise down I-95 swapping memories of road-tripping to other college football cathedrals.

The unplanned vote to forgo the final night at the condo and head back to Orlando had been taken about an hour into the post-game tailgate at the RV, and the final tally was 6 for and none against with 2 abstentions. None of the guys were dying to put in the effort required to return to Five Points, especially given the limited pleasure to be gained from rubbing such a close win under the noses of the locals. They were all gassed, and with work looming on Monday, the opportunity to have ten extra hours to recover at home was too hard for any of them to pass up.

Batesy had elected not to drink after the game and volunteered to take the first shift at the wheel, knowing full well that he'd probably drive the whole way. No one objected, least of all Batesy. Sarge called the married couple and confirmed that no one needed to worry about Sharks. Hot meals were scrounged from friendly neighbors at the baseball lot before the flight home left shortly after 10:00.

"You really bought tickets for last year's National Championship game before the season began? You thought the Gators were that good?" Batesy was incredulous.

"At Glendale in '06, we met some Ohio State fans that had done the same thing for that year's National Championship, assuming they'd save money if they made it and could sell the tickets for double what they paid if they didn't. We paid so much for our tickets that year that I figured it was a safe investment."

Batesy was impressed.

"I didn't know the economy was gonna tank. Thank God it all worked out. I'd have lost my shirt if I had to sell them."

"That's pretty bad ass that you went to two National Championship games in three years. Didn't you go to the Final Four in Atlanta, too?"

The Benchwarmer tried to muzzle his pride. "I passed on the chance to go to New Orleans in '96 and it burned me up.

That was my junior year at UF, and I swore I wouldn't miss the next one."

As the highway dragged on, they continued swapping stories about Tebow and the Gators' recent return to glory. Dallas Baker's two touchdowns to edge out Tennessee in Knoxville in '06. Chanting "Score More Points" in the revenge game against Georgia in Jacksonville in '08. Tebow caked in Braveheart field paint during the rampage in the rain in Tallahassee a month later. There was a fair share of heart break along the way, too. The blocked punt at Auburn in '06, Les Miles going 5-for-5 on 4th down in Baton Rouge in '07, the stumble against Ole Miss in Gainesville in '08 that led Tebow to improvise "The Speech" in the post-game press conference. The Benchwarmer had been there for all of it.

"You really think last year's SEC Championship game was better than the National Championship games?"

"It was the first time Tebow had come back in the fourth quarter to win, and he had to do it without Percy. And that stadium was electric. I swear, when Cunningham got that sack on Alabama's last drive, my soul came out of my chest, and it floated up there under the roof of the Georgia Dome crowd surfing on all the crazies."

Batesy knew exactly what he meant.

"When you're the champion of the SEC, you're the kings of the world. I wasn't worried about Oklahoma. I knew that as long as we didn't have a bad day, we would go home with the hardware in January."

And so their reflections kept rolling on. The last slice of the moon sank ahead of them beneath the horizon as their coach veered west on I-4 for the final crawl home. The end of the Tebow era was close now, just four more precious games. Batesy and the Benchwarmer knew they'd savor every last play.